

**Testimony of Irina Veselykh
For The House International Relations Committee
June 15, 2006**

My name is Irina Veselykh. In 1983, I graduated from the construction college in Amur and from 1984 until 1991 I worked as an engineer in the department of production at a construction company. I was married in 1996 and I have two daughters. During perestroika (1992-1997), I re-qualified to be an accountant and later worked as a senior accountant at a hospital.

Afterwards, I divorced my alcoholic husband, took a one-year course in massage and cosmetology, and moved to Volgodonsk where I worked in a clinic as a physiotherapist. I was only making \$100/month and supporting two children on my own.

Because I needed more income and was in debt, I began looking for advertisements for short-term work abroad. I had hoped to work for a maximum of six months to one year and send the money home to my children.

I came across an advertisement offering work abroad in the newspaper "Chance." The company that I turned to for help finding work appeared to be entirely legitimate and I didn't feel any apprehension. The Agency for Employment Abroad offered me work as a waitress. I was given 500 € for a visa, tickets, and travel with the understanding that I would return 1000 € when I was working. I was to earn 800-900 € a month. Everything was arranged from the company's offices in Volgograd and Moscow. I was told that I would have a six month contract once I arrived in Germany. I signed their contract since everything seemed trustworthy and they assured me that the work in Germany was legal.

I traveled by bus through Poland without any money for food. When I arrived in Germany in the city of Bremen, I was met by two extremely rude young Russians named Evgeny and Tatiana. They took my passport and informed me that there was no waitress job and that I was expected to work as a prostitute. When I objected, they told me that if I wanted to go home I had to pay back the 1000 €. I tried to refuse and they beat me. When I threatened to go to the police, I was warned that the police had been bought off and that without my documents I would be considered the criminal. They said that all the pimps are working under the protection of the police. They control girls with the help of the police. They showed me photographs of dead girls who had tried to go to the police.

I was terribly shocked and afraid. I decided that the only way to survive was to cooperate. Almost immediately, Tatiana and Evgeny left for a vacation in the Canary Islands and I was sold to another man, Viktor, who was running a business in Bremen selling young Russian girls to Belgian pimps for \$15,000 a piece. I started working in a brothel managed by a German woman named Tony. This was a kind of point of dispensation – some women were sold to Belgium, some to the Netherlands and other places. I was popular with German and Dutch men so they kept me there. The majority of men were Germans.

Tony's place was a legal brothel but she knew that most of the women there were illegal and had no documents because all of their documents had been taken by the pimps. Viktor and a Lithuanian woman named Monika gave me a fake Lithuanian passport. All the new Russian girls who came were forced to buy the fake Lithuanian passports for 2000 €. However, Viktor kept the actual passports and the false ones. In addition, Viktor and the other pimps reminded all of us constantly that they knew where our families were and they would kill our children if we tried to escape.

I complained that I could not pay my debts, so they sent me to a different club where I could service more clients and pay lower rent. I was then taken to a club called "Diplomat," which is in the Netherlands on the border with Germany. But I saw right away that no matter how many men there were, I could never repay the debts. I immediately made the decision to run away. There were three other women, also terrified, who had already been living there for a few months (also on false documents). A beautiful Russian girl by the name of Tatiana helped me try

to run away by stealing my fake passport and all of my real documents from the pimps. She said she could not go with me because the pimps had threatened to kill her two year old son back in Russia. She wanted me to get away and get help for her and her family. But I later learned from Russian men who were trying to help me that she was killed for helping me.

Other girls in the club helped me escape and I took a taxi to the town of Van Shoten, looking for a man named Ben who owned a nightclub called “Antenna” and was known to help girls escape from trafficking and the Russian mafia. He helped hide me but the Russian mafia found me working as a hostess and told me that I was going to be killed. That night Ben took me by car to his Dutch friends, who hid me for two weeks in their garage and brought me food while I was being hunted. I was moved from one place to another, working in nightclubs as a waitress but not as a prostitute.

Many good Dutch people tried to help me, but I was always followed by the Russian gangsters. I needed to get to the police but it was dangerous. The Dutch people I was staying with brought my 21 year old daughter to Netherlands to help me. With my daughter, who speaks English, I went directly to the police. But at the police station, I was immediately separated from my daughter and detained for five days by the Dutch National Police. So began a long, terrible process of multiple questionings and misunderstandings by the authorities.

The authorities wanted to charge me for using the false passport that I was provided by the criminals. I gave the Dutch police all of the information about what had happened including information about the traffickers, the Russian mafia. I told them everything I knew and I thought they would help me. I was not provided with a lawyer and I was suddenly told that I had to work out the fine levied by the judicial system of Netherlands for the use of a false passport. I hadn’t even used that passport and did not agree with the decision of the court. But who listened to me? After all the assistance that I provided the investigators, I was placed in humiliating conditions and remained in serious danger without protection from the Russian gangsters.

After determining that the crime had taken place in Germany, the Dutch National Police turned me over to the Migration Police and they placed me in a shelter. I provided the authorities with all of the information again while the police investigated and verified every part of my story. After two weeks, I was released from the shelter and I returned to my daughter.

But eventually, my daughter had to go home to work. I stayed in the Netherlands for two years living only on the small benefits I received with the help of kind Dutch people. Finally, I grew tired of this situation. I could not wait any longer for my appointment in court living in such circumstances. I told the Dutch authorities that I wanted to go home. I said that I would return if they needed me to testify, but I was very, very tired. My health was poor. I missed my daughters. I was constantly depressed and often thinking about suicide.

But instead of helping me go home, the Dutch government decided I had not suffered enough and placed me in prison for three months because I didn’t pay the fine for using a false passport – a fine that I didn’t know about. There was a contradiction between the Dutch National Police who wanted the fine paid and the Immigration Police who acknowledged that I was a victim of trafficking.

For one month, I was not allowed to get in contact with lawyers or with my relatives. I started a hunger strike to defend my innocence, but as a result I was put into solitary confinement with only a mattress on the floor.

I was only able to get help when my daughter contacted the Russian consul in the Netherlands with the help of the Angel Coalition in Moscow. My daughter had called the Angel Coalition Trafficking Victim Assistance Center on their toll-free helpline and the Angel Coalition contacted the Dutch law enforcement liaison officer at the Dutch Embassy in Moscow. He began investigating with the Dutch police while the Angel Coalition worked with my family. I was released on the street with 30 € The police were supposed to take me to the consulate but they gave me no help. Local people helped me get to the consulate. From there I was sent for a short time to a shelter and then returned home to Russia. The Angel Coalition met me at the airport, gave me a ticket home, and provided me with medicine. This is the only human

assistance that I received during the entire time that I was in this terrible situation. The Angel Coalition is still helping me cope with all the terrible things I went through in Germany and the Netherlands.

I did not commit any crime in those countries and I was put in prison for absolutely nothing. The people who involved me in that situation are still free and continue to traffic women under government cover. My rights were violated - who will pay me back for all of my suffering? In those countries, the rights of immigrants in difficult situation are violated and their governments do not want to take responsibility for what is happening on their territory.